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ABSTRACT

This newsletter discusses a Swedish research project investigating the command immigrant school children living in Sweden have of their native language and of Swedish as a second language. The project's objective is to describe the children's language proficiency and factors promoting or inhibiting it in the classroom. The study is undertaken in the context of Swedish policy promoting active bilingualism in immigrant children. Factors affecting bilingual instruction are outlined, including student background characteristics (group and individual), language use, and teaching models and processes. The sample groups for the pilot and main 3-year study are described, data collection methods are chronicled, the analysis of language proficiency is sketched, and the applicability of the results is discussed briefly. (MSE)

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Swedish as a second language
Home language in compulsory school

Current project:
BILINGUALISM IN SCHOOL

The development of Swedish and home language in bilingual pupils results from an interaction of factors connected with their background, language use outside school and teaching organisation.
Linguistic proficiency, moreover, comprises a number of components, each of which requires separate attention. This article deals with the design of a project aimed at describing the development of bilingual competence in compulsory school pupils with home languages (mother tongues) other than Swedish.

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BILINGUALISM IN SCHOOL

Presenting the background to a current project

Åke Viberg

Who is bilingual?

Everybody living in Sweden comes into contact with two or more languages. In this sense everybody can be said to be bilingual or polylingual. In speaking of active bilingualism, however - especially in connection with the objectives for immigrant children's language instruction - we aim a good deal higher. The criteria to be adopted, however, are open to discussion. One can refer to identity, saying that people are not bilingual unless they identify with both languages or are identified by others as speaking both languages. A person who has grown up with two languages is also more "typically" bilingual than somebody who has first come to learn a second language in school ("school bilingualism"). One can employ a more pragmatical definition, saying that the person using two languages in his or her daily life is bilingual. Command of language is another point of departure. In these terms, to be bilingual one must have attained a definite (and relatively high) level of proficiency in both languages. This, among other things, is the basic principle adopted by designers of tests of various kinds, aimed at the quantification of language proficiency, but also by teachers trying to pinpoint their pupils' developmental status, so as to help them develop their command of one of the languages concerned.

The overriding aim of language instruction for immigrant children, as defined in the Riksdag resolution, is the promotion of active bilingualism. This requires the pupils to achieve a high level of proficiency in both languages and also to develop positive attitudes towards their practical use.

The "Bilingualism in School" project

The "Bilingualism in School" project, funded by the NBE, is based at the Centre for Bilingualism Research, Stockholm University. The project team comprises Päivi Juvonen, Inger Lindberg and, as project leader, the author. This article is a presentation of the questions which the project

sets out to answer and of the theoretical background. Presentation of the end result will be reserved for a subsequent article, because a second phase of data collection is scheduled for the next school year.

The purpose of the project is to investigate the development of command of the home language and Swedish in compulsory school pupils with home languages other than Swedish, as well as the impact of various teaching factors on language development. The principal purpose is not to evaluate various teaching models but rather to achieve an in-depth description of the pupils' command of language and how it is affected by what goes on in the classroom. The point is that bilingual teaching has proved extremely difficult to evaluate. In a critical review of surveys conducted in the USA, McLaughlin (1985, chap. 10) observes that, with so many factors influencing the result, no more than a small proportion of the relevant variables have been verified in any survey.

What is needed is a unifying theory concerning the way in which command of both languages develops in the bilingual individual and concerning the factors respectively promoting and inhibiting development. Cummins & Swain (1986) quite rightly emphasise that survey findings cannot possibly be interpreted until they are viewed in relation to such a theory. Data from individual studies are meaningful only when they can be compared with data from other surveys based on the same theory.

A characterisation of bilingual teaching

Figure 1 is an overview of some of the main factors which have to be taken into account in descriptions of bilingual teaching. Factors affecting the pupils' background can be divided into group factors and individual factors. The pupil's mother tongue (or home language), which we will abbreviate L1, is the most important background factor from the viewpoint of language learning. The structural distance between L1 and Swedish as the second language (L2) plays an equally important part in the learning of Swedish (in cases where the home language clearly predominates). Swedish, moreover, does a great deal to influence the various minority languages. This influence too assumes a variety of manifestations, depending on the structural relation between Swedish (L2) and various L1's.

Ethnic group is another background factor, and one which need not coincide with mother tongue. The Christian Assyrian-Syrian immigrants who, on one level at least, represent a special ethnic group, have several different mother tongues. Apart from those speaking a variant of Eastern Aramaic vernacular, variously known as Assyrian, Turoyo or Turabdinian, there are also those who speak Kurdish, Turkish or some form of colloquial Arabic. Ethnically the latter differ considerably from ethnic, Moslem Arabs. Obviously the children's learning in school is greatly affected by the fundamental differences existing between different ethnic groups as regards cultural values and attitudes to the majority community and to school. In research, more specific attention has been paid to the differences existing in communication patterns and style of learning. Wong-Fillmore (1985) has shown that there are great differences in learning style between school pupils belonging to different ethnic groups. Her survey suggests that a type of teaching producing good results from children in one ethnic group can have the opposite effect on children with a different ethnic background.

Factors such as parental education, occupation and economic circumstances, usually summarised in terms of socio-economic status (SES), have a crucial bearing on all pupils' school achievement. Pupils whose parents have low status in this respect generally tend to do less well at school. When evaluating bilingual teaching, one great problem has been that of keeping the socio-economic background factors under control. In many surveys of the kind which have been so numerous in the USA, where survey groups receiving bilingual instruction have been compared with reference groups receiving some other type of instruction, there have been found to exist considerable differences between survey and reference groups with regard to SES, which in turn has made it impossible to interpret differences in learning achievement purely as a yardstick of the efficacy of the different teaching models. In Sweden there are great differences in average socio-economic status, both between different immigrant groups and by comparison with the Swedish majority population.

Figure 1. A characterisation of bilingual instruction

B A C K G R O U N D

GROUP FACTORS	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS	
	a. Cognitive	b. Affective
Mother tongue	Intelligence	Attitudes
Ethnic group	Linguistic ability	Motivation
Socio-economic status (SES)	Cognitive style	Situational anxiety

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L A N G U A G E U S E

MODEL PREFERENCES	DOMAINS
L1 < Peers / Adults	Home
	Leisure
L2 < Peers / Adults	School
	(Religion)

T E A C H I N G

TEACHING MODEL	CLASSROOM PROCESS
Home language class	Classroom organisation
Composite class	Types of activity
Ordinary class + home language periods	Interactive pattern
	Qualitative description of the language
Preparatory class	Language choice: L1 / L2
Single-language class	

R E S U L T S

a. In school	b. After school
Language proficiency, L1	Occupational choice
Language proficiency, L2	Adjustment
School achievement	
Self-image	

There are also important individual differences between the pupils which have a crucial bearing on their learning in school. In Figure 1, individual factors of this kind are divided into two groups. Cognitive factors is a collective designation for (general) intelligence, language ability and cognitive style. Affective factors cover attitudes, motivation and situational anxiety. Gardner (1985), who has closely scrutinised research into the influence of individual factors on second language learning, has argued in various connections that factors such as intelligence and language ability make the biggest difference to the learning of foreign languages outside the environment in which the target language is spoken. In that situation, attitudes to the groups speaking the target language as a mother tongue are of minor importance. By contrast, when a second language is learned in the country where it constitutes a majority language, i.e. in the situation faced by immigrants and their children, the affective factors are crucial and quite paramount over the cognitive factors.

Affective factors, clearly, are also crucial to the children's willingness to use the home language. It seems fairly common for immigrant children to feel under pressure from classmates at school not to show any sign of being able to speak a language other than Swedish. In the long run, of course, this has a negative impact on their command of the home language. There are also immigrant children who are reluctant to use Swedish, even though they may have a relatively good command of the language. Inculcating a positive attitude on the pupil's part towards the active use of both Swedish and the home language in every situation where this is possible appears to be a basic prerequisite for achieving the aim of bilingualism.

Cummins & Swain (1986) maintain that individual factors have different effects on different aspects of language proficiency. Certain aspects of proficiency are bound up with classroom skills, such as reading and writing and assimilating the concepts and vocabulary associated with different school subjects. These aspects of language proficiency are dependent on individual differences of a cognitive nature, e.g. intelligence. On the other hand, those aspects of language proficiency which are bound up with a basic communicative skill of using the language in everyday situations appear to be more dependent on the extent to which the

pupil has taken part in conversations with speakers of the language. Disposition to make contact and to enter into situations where a particular language is used rather than avoiding such situations is, in turn, closely connected with the affective factors. The basic communicative skill is closely connected with those aspects of language proficiency which are bound up with identity and determination to sound like a native, i.e. to speak the language without a foreign accent and without making even such errors of grammar as do not significantly affect the ability to make oneself understood.

When describing L1 and L2 development in school, of course, one can at least regard the language use occurring outside school. Certain researchers (e.g. Heath 1986) go so far as to claim that language use outside school is also the crucial factor influencing school-related language proficiency, more crucial even than the language in which instruction is conveyed at school. Our observations of a grade 4 Assyrian-Syrian class in Södertälje distinctly revealed the importance of language use outside school. Although these pupils were born in Sweden and received most of their instruction in Swedish (good instruction at that, as far as we could tell), several of them had not yet attained a fluent command of spoken Swedish. One important reason for this, presumably, is that, in addition to adults (e.g. teachers in school), children also need peers as models in their language learning.

In the widely observed Canadian immersion education, where English-speaking pupils receive most of their subject tuition in school in French, it has also been found that, even after six years' tuition in French, they still speak the language with a distinct accent, even though they can understand and assimilate the subject tuition just about as well as pupils having French as their mother tongue. Swain (1985) puts this down to the very lack of contact with peers speaking the language as L1. The Assyrian-Syrian pupils were in a comparable situation. Most of them had no Swedish peers out of school and in school they formed a class of their own where there were no children who spoke Swedish at home. In order for children to achieve a high level of bilingualism, they must have access to adults and peers as models in both languages.

Domain is a central concept where language use is concerned (Fishman 1971). A domain is a group of situations normally requiring a particular form of language. To a child of school age, the most important domains are those indicated in Figure 1, viz Home, Leisure (outside the home), School and, for those who are actively religious, Religion as well. If the child meets one of the languages in only one or two domains, this can prevent him from coming into contact with certain parts of the language. This is perhaps most apparent in the matter of vocabulary, which can become stultified in fields relating to a particular domain.

The design of the instruction received by pupils is, of course, to a great extent determined by the "teaching model", i.e. home language class, composite class, preparatory class or ordinary Swedish class. In practice there is a fair amount of variety in the actual design of teaching within a particular model. There is a good deal of overlap between the models. To a greater or lesser extent, for example, there are cases of Finnish teachers teaching in Finnish in a home language class but using teaching materials in Swedish. It is not enough, then, just to check the timetable for the number of periods scheduled in Finnish and Swedish respectively when deciding the actual allocation of teaching time between the languages.

In view of the great variety which can exist within the various models as regards the actual design of teaching, it is important to study the classroom process. Classroom-oriented research has attracted a great deal of interest in the past very few years, especially in research relating to second language learning (see Seliger & Long, Eds. 1983 and Chaudron 1988). In this research, particular attention has been paid to the way in which language use in the classroom is influenced by variables such as classroom organisation (whole class/group/individual work), types of communicative activity and patterns of interaction. There are also great differences in teaching style between individual teachers. In certain classrooms, the teacher dominates things completely, for better or worse, giving the pupils only limited opportunities of themselves making active use of the language, while pupils in other classrooms have more scope for individual initiative.

A qualitative analysis of language in the classroom has also shown how certain linguistic functions and structures, central to normal communication, are heavily under-represented in many types of teaching. In teaching, pupils are confronted only with certain parts of natural usage. In the case of immigrant pupils having limited contact with Swedish or the home language outside the classroom, restrictions of this kind can, quite simply, prevent them from coming into contact with certain areas of the language. When studying bilingual instruction, special attention has to be devoted to the choice of language in the classroom. As has already been pointed out, one interesting field of inquiry concerns the way in which a textbook in Swedish is used when teaching proceeds in Finnish. By recording such lessons one can, for example, observe the extent to which explanations of words occur and how they are formulated.

The pupil sample

In the main study, lasting for three years as from 1st July 1987, data are being collected from pupils having Finnish as their mother tongue. Figure 2 shows the composition of this survey group. Altogether data are being collected from sixty pupils on two occasions, viz the 1987/88 and 1989/90 school years. On the first of these occasions, half the pupils were in grade 4 and the other half in grade 7. On the second occasion they will be in grades 6 and 9 respectively. In this way it will be possible to observe individual pupils longitudinally for about two years, at the same time as data from the entire survey group will represent development from grade 4 to grade 9. Data are also being collected from single-language reference groups consisting of monolingual Swedish and Finnish pupils respectively (the latter from schools in Finland).

As regards type of class, pupils attending home language class and receiving a great deal of their instruction in Finnish during the junior and intermediate level grades are being compared with pupils individually integrated in an ordinary Swedish class and receiving most of their instruction in Swedish and only a few hours' home language instruction every week. To achieve a certain spread, only a few pupils are being selected in each of the classes investigated.

Figure 2. Survey group

No. pupils and classes from which they are taken

Type of class:		Experimental groups: Swedish class		Home language class		Total		Control groups: Finnish	Swedish
No.		Pupil	Class	Pupil	Class	Pupil	Class	Pupil	Pupil
Grade:									
Time 1	Time 2								
Grade 4	Grade 6	10	4	20	4	30	8	10	10
Grade 7	Grade 9	10	4	20	4	30	8	10	10
Total		20	8	40	8	60	16	20	20

In addition to the main survey, there is quite a comprehensive corpus of comparative material from various other studies. In the autumn of 1986 a pilot survey was conducted in which data on Swedish language proficiency were collected from twenty Assyrian/Syrian pupils in a Södertälje school. The teaching form here was a single-language class, with all pupils coming from the same minority group but with Swedish as the main teaching language. Ten of the pupils were in grade 4 and ten in grade 6. A number of lessons were recorded in full.

Also as part of the project, a study of Spanish-speaking pupils at intermediate level is being undertaken by Maria Borgström as the basis of a doctoral thesis in pedagogics. So far recordings have been made in Swedish and Spanish of about fifty pupils in grade 4. New recordings of the same pupils will be made in grade 6. In this way it will also be possible to make comparisons between pupils having different first languages.

Collection of data

Data concerning language proficiency in Finnish and Swedish are being collected individually from all pupils in the survey group (on separate occasions by the Finnish-speaking and the two Swedish-speaking researchers respectively). To elucidate the pupils' language proficiency from as many different angles as possible, several different kinds of data are being collected: (a) a lengthy oral interview, including the task of verbally recounting a number of short, animated video films, (b) written reproduction of a video film and a number of essays on a freely chosen subject.

To a limited extent, the individual material will also be supplemented by means of conversations between pupils, as well as paired exercises (completing a communication task) and role play. The oral material will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will be keyed into a computer and tagged, i.e. the words will be given designations referring to parts of speech, which among other things will facilitate detailed studies of vocabulary.

As can be seen from Figure 1, language learning is influenced by a very large number of background factors. To elucidate these factors, a background questionnaire is being administered to each pupil individually. In addition to basic particulars concerning formative conditions and socio-economic background, this questionnaire will also include relatively detailed questions about the pupils' language use, i.e. the situations in which they use the home language and Swedish and their language of preference when talking to various persons, e.g. parents, siblings and classmates. Certain data are also being collected concerning the pupils' school achievement (as viewed by the teachers). The background factors can also be taken to include data about the school and the area where the pupils are living, e.g. the number of people belonging to their own minority group and the relative size of the immigrant population in the area generally.

In addition, certain classroom studies are being made in the classes from which the pupils are taken. To begin with these will comprise informal observation in the classroom and conversations with pupils and teachers concerning their opinions of the teaching. In this way it will be possible to make quite a few important observations on an informal basis and with a minimum of intrusion. A more detailed study of communication, however, will necessarily involve tape-recording and transcribing entire lessons. This will also make it possible to count the incidence of various linguistic characteristics and their distribution between the pupil and, individually, between different pupils (see Lindberg 1988).

Analysis of language proficiency

The main purpose of the project is to characterise the pupils' command of both languages. Describing an individual person's language proficiency,

however, poses a problem, not least on account of the great uncertainty which prevails regarding the components of language proficiency and their interrelationship. Different aspects of what, nowadays, is quite generally termed communicative competence have to be elucidated. In addition to grammar and vocabulary, this capacity includes the construction of units larger than sentences, e.g. conversations and texts, and ability to adapt language to the speech situation and to different interlocutors.

The model of language proficiency underlying the planning of Bilingualism in School is sketched in Viberg (1988a & 1988b). A distinction is there made between the following main components:

SOUND STRUCTURE
VOCABULARY
GRAMMAR
CONVERSATION STRUCTURE
TEXT STRUCTURE

An important part of the survey is concerned with investigating the relation between command of the home language and command of Swedish. This will among other things make it possible to test a number of hypotheses formulated by Cummins, such as the threshold level hypothesis and the hypothesis that cognitive/theoretical linguistic skills can be transferred between languages, on condition that a certain threshold has been surmounted (Cummins & Swain 1986, chap. 5. Cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 1981). The hypothesis of transferability can be tested, for example, by studying capacity for building up a coherent narrative when recounting the video films.

The results cannot be described at any great length, because the second phase of data collection has not yet taken place. A systematic study of narrative skill in both languages, however, is in press (Juvonen, Lindberg & Viberg 1989).

Applicability of the results

In practical terms, the results can contribute towards a further development of content of methods in the teaching of home language and Swedish as

a second language in compulsory school and to teacher education for these fields. Above all, the project will yield a detailed description of the way in which the pupils' language is structured at different levels: how central parts of grammar and vocabulary are structured, what strategies the pupils employ when verbally recounting a story or when structuring texts. It will also be possible to draw certain conclusions regarding the connection between language development and teaching design, as well as the pupils' use of language outside school as reflected by the background questionnaire. In this way the project will also contribute towards the debate on the effect of different teaching models, even though its emphasis will be on understanding the processes governing language development rather than on attempting an evaluation.

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